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THE FEMININE IDEAL OF CHRISTIANITY.

LUKE I : 49.

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II.

I POINTED out in the previous paper¹ that Christianity is, before all things, the apotheosis of woman. It has done greater things for her than for any other class. It has done more than reinstate her; it has given her the dominion. The handmaid has been placed on the seat of the mighty, and the mighty have been dethroned. The charter of this social revolution is the Sermon on the Mount. The originality of that sermon is not the virtues it describes, but the blessings it promises them. These blessings are not so much the favor of heaven as the empire of earth. "Great is your reward in heaven" does not mean that the possessors of these virtues will get a reward when they die, but that their treasure is already secured on the bosom of the Father. The favor of heaven they always had, but it was under a cloud. The cloud is now to be lifted, and the divine favor is to be made manifest; they are to have a front view—to "see God." They who now mourn are to be comforted; they who now serve are to inherit the earth; they who are now persecuted are to rule. It does not mean that they are to exchange their qualities for opposite qualities; that would be a simple return to the old régime. It is these qualities themselves that are to be lifted from the valley to the mountain. It is a new ideal of heroism that the world is promised. It is the crooked that are to be made straight; it is the rough places that are to be made plain. The virtues called passive are to become the most powerful influences in the government of men, and the feminine type is to displace the reign of muscular power.

¹ See the BIBLICAL WORLD, July, 1898, pp. 29-36.

I have spoken of passive virtues. The expression is not mine, but one in current use. I do not think it in every respect a happy phrase. It is certainly, in common language, made to include more than it really does include. It conveys the impression that the feminine is distinguished from the masculine type by a less amount of strength. This is a mistake. The distinction is not between the amounts but the modes of strength. Strictly speaking, they are both forms of action. Both involve the exertion of force on the part of the individual. The one needs force to bear up, and the other, force to bear down. The truth is, there has been a prevailing tendency to confound passive with merely negative virtue. There are three genders of virtue as there are three genders of sex—masculine, feminine, and neuter. The masculine is power to do; the feminine is power to bear; the neuter is the inability to exert any power. In the moral world the last two often look very like one another, because they often reach the same result. One who can bear insult does not revenge himself; one who cannot feel insult does not revenge himself. The effect is the same, but the cause is very different. In the one case the desisting from vengeance is the result of a force, and of a force often powerfully exerted. In the other case it springs from the absence of all force; it is the effect of pure inanity, and has wrought out an end in whose merit it has no share.

If we turn to the Sermon on the Mount, we shall find a striking evidence of this. The virtues there spoken of may all be either feminine or neuter. There is a poverty of spirit which springs, not from humility, but from the want of it; not from seeing something beyond, but from being bounded by one's own horizon; it is the self-contentment that aspires not, and it has no beatitude. There is a meekness which is the calm of glass, and not the calm of the sea; it exists only from the absence of inward storm. There is a mercy which comes from sheer indifference, and is inferior to the spirit of anger. There is a purity of heart which is the result of pure innocence—which envies not, because it has not learned the value of things. There is a peacemaking which is born of pusillanimity, and has no claim to

be called the offspring of God. It was the easiest thing in the world to mistake any one of these virtues for its stepsister. In point of fact, it was this mistake in identity that gave rise to the phrase, "the foolishness of the cross." The pagan and the Jew alike mistook the one sister for the other. It seemed to them, and seemed rightly from their premises, that Christianity was inculcating a weak and an enervating morality. The Jew objected to the children brought to Jesus, because it seemed incongruous with his Messianic expectations. The Roman wanted to obliterate the *ideal* of Christ. He was afraid that the military strength of the empire would be weakened by effeminacy. Paul told him he was in error. He told him he had mistaken the feminine for the neuter gender. He told him that the passive virtues of Christ were not forms of negation, but forms of action—that the gospel was the very power of God. He told him that, had the princes of his empire consulted their own interest, they would have kept the ideal of Christ alive for the military training of its youth. None of them had known the hidden wisdom; "had they known it, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory."

I shall now call up from the old world one or two of these stepsisters of the virtues of the mount, with a view to show both the cause and the certainty of the mistaken personality. I shall begin with one of the most mature products of Judaism—the book of Job. The motto of the book of Job may be said to be, "Blessed are the persecuted;" we shall, therefore, write upon it this inscription. Job is the model of the man persecuted by the world and making no sign. He is the representative of the old patience; he suffers mutely; he neither strives nor cries against God. What he does strive and cry against is a certain *theory* of God—the theory that he must have been a great sinner to have suffered so much. He insists on taking God without a theory, without even a hope: "Though he slay me, yet will I trust in him." Had Job then reached the mount of beatitudes—the blessing of the persecuted pronounced by Jesus? No, and for the simple reason that he *had* no theory. He was not prepared to say, "Mine is the kingdom of heaven."

His was a dumb resignation. It was a patience founded on a sense of human impotence—upon the nothingness of the creature in the presence of God. There is a passage in the Talmud which counsels a patient lowliness of mind on the ground that we shall all be food for worms one day. Christ's counsel is on the opposite ground—the ground that we are immortal and shall not be food for worms: "Theirs is the kingdom of heaven." His is, in short, a patience resting upon a joyous view of God. Not so is that of Job. This is precisely the ground on which Elihu reproves Job. So far as the three friends were concerned, Job had triumphed. He had refused to believe that he was afflicted because he was a special sinner. But it was one thing to deny God's *retributive* hand; it was another thing to ignore his *beneficent* hand. Job had been content to accept God's sovereignty. It was better than rebellion; but it was less than love, less than hope, in the deepest sense, less even than faith. Elihu is the protest of the old dispensation against itself—against a dull and dead submission to an imperative law in which the spirit of man is overwhelmed by a power it cannot comprehend.

There is, then, all the difference in the world between the blessedness of the patience of Job and the blessedness of the patience eulogized on the mount. It is the difference between the negative and the positive, between the vacant and the full, between the neuter and the feminine. Let us pass on to another illustration from another sphere. This time I shall make the comparison lie between the second beatitude and the sacrificial spirit of Buddhism. "Blessed are they that mourn," says our Lord. Now, Buddhism is essentially the mourning religion. It bids its votaries realize the misery of life. It tells them they must cease to desire. They must come to feel that nothing is worth wishing for. They must awake to the utter hollowness, the vanity, the unreality of existence. They must learn to esteem death more than life, and, in order to reach this goal, they must train themselves to think meanly of human pleasure.

Now, let us concede that there is here a ground for the spirit of sacrifice. It would be folly to deny that, if a man

should succeed in obliterating to himself the value of life, he will be able to give up everything. But what I want to point out is that this is not the sacrificial mourning of the second beatitude. There is all the difference of infinitude between the sacrifice of the valley and the sacrifice of the mountain. It is just the difference of neuter and feminine. The sacrifice of the valley is founded on powerlessness; that of the mountain on power. The sacrifice of the valley is built on despair; that of the mountain on hope. The sacrifice of the valley keeps its eye on the shut horizon; that of the mountain on the opened heaven. Buddha and Christ both say, "Blessed are they that mourn;" but they say it for opposite reasons. Buddha says, "Blessed are they that mourn, for they shall not be disappointed by anything that they lose;" Christ says, "Blessed are they that mourn, for they shall be comforted—shall find a fresh source of joy." What Christ means is that dissatisfaction with the present proves we are fit for a wider future and will get it; what Buddha means is that we are fit for nothing else than sacrifice and have no reason to expect it.

What is the comparative working power of these two views? That of Buddha goes a certain length, and with effect. It can help a man so far as he himself is concerned. It can make him individually calm amid the many crosses of life. But what happens when it is not a question of the personal, but of the sympathetic? What if I am called to contemplate, not my own cross, but the cross of others? What if I am asked to comfort, not myself, but my brother man, or rather one who is not my brother in opinion, but has always held an optimistic view? Has despair any impulse to propagate itself? Is not its calm essentially built on torpor—on a frozen lake? Has it not gained what peace it has by giving up the capacity for thinking, the capacity for working, the capacity for striving? If it would comfort others, it must take these powers again, and in taking them its calm will die. Its only chance for self-preservation lies in the sleep of the soul, in the numbness of the heart; it is essential to the calm of Buddhism that the individual should be confined within his own pain.

But let us take the other case—the case of Christianity. Suppose that, instead of being the symptom of our nothingness, pain be recognized as a symptom of our returning health. Suppose it be taken as an evidence that the mortification of the members has given place to a thrill of sensitive feeling; what would be the effect of this upon the sufferer? It would not only be a comfort to himself as an individual; it would lift him out of himself to embrace others. He would feel impelled to impart the source of his own joy. That is precisely the position of the second beatitude. A man is told that his pain means convalescence. The message not only becomes a comfort; it becomes a stimulus. Everybody has pain as well as he; that which can solace him can solace everybody. He has not only found an anodyne to soothe; he has found an anodyne to distribute. Despair is self-centering, but hope tends to shed itself abroad. The sacrifice of the mount is not a neuter but a feminine principle; it is the action of the heart.

The third instance I shall mention of the stepsisters to the virtues of the mount is that suggested by one aspect of stoicism. Christ says, "Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth." The stoic also says, "Blessed are the meek." He counsels the keeping down of all turbulent feeling. He would deprecate the retaliation of injury or even the desire to retaliate. Has then the stoic anticipated Christ? No; for, here again, the originality of the precept lies, not in itself, but in its contemplated reward. What reward does the stoic contemplate? Self-culture—the emancipation of his own nature. His object is not really to save the feelings of the man who has injured him by refraining from chastisement. His attitude toward his injurer is all along one of contempt. He looks upon his insults as he would regard the buzzing of a fly. The man is beneath his notice. He has no more relation to his life than a dream has. He is a phantom, an unreality, a sport of nature, a thing out of the order of the universe. The meekness of the stoic is a meekness which springs from the absence of all promise on the part of his enemy.

But the power of Christ lies just in the point where stoicism

stops short—in the *reward* of meekness. The stoic restrains himself on the ground that his injurer is a poor creature. Christ asks his followers to restrain themselves on precisely the opposite ground—that he is not necessarily a poor creature, but has in him the germ of something better: “Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth.” To inherit the earth means to inherit everything about it—the injurer included. It is the hope that one day I shall possess that which now is refractory. It is the expectation that a time may come when the waste places of Jerusalem shall be built up, when the desert shall break forth into singing, and the myrtle shall take the place of the briar. This is a totally different motive from that which animates the meekness of the stoic. It is founded, not on the worthlessness, but on the prospective worth of the delinquent. It is rooted in the conviction that things are not what they seem. It rests, not on the contempt which overshadows, but on the love which magnifies existing germs of virtue and imputes germs that are not yet created. The meekness of Christ is derived, not from the lessening, but from the enlarging of the value of individual life—of the value even of that life which is the subject of moral pity.

And this difference is typical of the whole pagan world. It is as true of mercy in physical things as it is of meekness in moral things. What is the distinction between the charity of the ancients and the charity of the moderns? It is sometimes said that the religion of Christ has been the origin of beneficent institutions—hospitals, infirmaries, asylums, and the like. This is a mistake; such things existed before Christ. But if we look beyond the stone and lime, we shall find the real original element in Christian charity. Such beneficent institutions existed, but they did not exist for the sake of the individual, and for this simple reason, that no individual was valued for his own sake. A sick slave might be nursed and tended, but it was for the benefit of his master; a wounded soldier might be cared for, but it was for the advantage of the state. Cases that were hopeless for the master or hopeless for the state had no interest for the community. A broken limb could be an object of solici-

tude so long as there was any chance of its repair. When the chance of its repair was gone, it was left to perish or made to perish; it was of no further use to the state, and therefore it had no further ground for its being. The idea that an object might become a thing of solicitude just on account of its dilapidation, that a creature might attract the interest of the beholder in proportion as it had ceased to be useful to the community, was a thought which never entered, which never could enter, into the heart of the old world. To neither Roman nor Jew did the individual have any interest in himself. To the Roman he was a member of the state; to the Jew he was a member of the family; to neither had he any independent being. But Christianity has introduced a new régime. Here for the first time the individual is an end in himself. Here for the first time the element of personal weakness becomes an object of solicitude for its own sake. Here for the first time the sorrows of the afflicted are estimated, not by the losses they shall bring to the rich, but by the pain they shall cause to the sufferers themselves. The greatest thing which Christianity has done for the spirit of woman is to put into her hand a microscope—to give her the power of seeing little things. The spirit of womanhood is the spirit of the new charity. It ceases to look at masses; it keeps its eye on the individual life. It regards not his price to the state; it considers not his advantage to the community; it views only his need. The strength of his claim is the strength of his necessity. The Roman dropped the protective hand where the argument of utility failed. Christianity's argument for charity only began there. It took up men because they *were* useless, because they were unprofitable to the state. It took them up just because the state had laid them down, and just where it had laid them down. It gathered them from the highways and the hedges—from the waste places of the community. It was a new order of chivalry which it proposed to inaugurate. The old order of chivalry was to redress the wrongs of beauty. Beauty was an adjunct of the state, because beauty was power. Pagan fiction could describe the retaliation of the injury to Helen, or could tell how the last Tarquin was banished for a

Roman matron's sake. Christ brought in a higher chivalry—to redress the wrongs of ugliness, to follow the ninety and nine which had no beauty, no excellence, no power. Mercy is the youngest born of the children of God, and the prerogative of mercy is this, “to seek and to save that which was lost.”



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